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UNCLAS YEREVAN 001523

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT OF IRAN TO VISIT ARMENIA

REFS: A) YEREVAN 1420 B) YEREVAN 1474

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

12. (SBU) Armenian President Robert Kocharian announced June 24 that Iranian President (Ali) Mohammad Khatami-Ardakani would visit Armenia this September. According to the announcement, Khatami will be the first Iranian head of state to visit Armenia. GOAM representatives said the visit was intended to "cement friendly relations" between the neighboring countries. Top on the agenda will be upcoming joint projects including the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline (ref A), the planned hydroelectric power plant on the Arax River and the Kajaran tunnel in Armenia's southern Syunik province. This announcement comes on the heels of recent visits by GOAM officials to Iran including President Kocharian's Chief of Staff Artashes Tumanian and Minister of Agriculture Davit Lokyan (ref B).

COMMENT

13. (SBU) MFA sources tell us that the agenda remains tentative. The GOAM has been careful to portray the upcoming meeting as principally economic in nature and has downplayed any implications of a major shift in political alliances. Meanwhile, Iranian press reports continue to reach Armenia presenting the initiative as a move to enhance Iran's regional position. Armenian-Iranian bilateral negotiations, however, are usually subject to long delays, and the results are frequently more modest than the two governments project publicly.
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